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SECULAR RECREATION

IT should not be necessary to read very deeply between the lines of the two previous chapters in order to understand that there is much of what Americans would call "recreational behavior" which is tightly integrated with economic and religious behavior. Stores and bakeries are foci of social interaction. Rites of passage and other rituals are occasions for parties and celebrations. 517

The purpose of the present chapter is to describe what might be classified as "recreation for its own sake," behavior which is certainly recreational but does not appear to be closely integrated with any of the other cultural categories which have been discussed.

THE CLUB

The "Sport Club" of Munṣif is a new institution which appears to have been started for the sole purpose of organizing the leisure activities of adolescents and young adults. If it has any other purpose, such as political activity, no hint whatever was given of it. 575

PLAYS

We have seen that the club's headquarters is regularly used as an everyday gathering place. It is also used for giving the annual village play in August. The village play antedates the club by many years, but the club seems to have taken over the greater part of the responsibility in putting it on. It is not clear exactly when the play was introduced into the village. Middle-aged adults seem always to have remembered it, but though traditional Arab culture has something resembling plays—actually narrative poetry recited by several individuals—the observed phenomenon in the village seems clearly to be part of the recent acculturative process. 536 545

Perhaps the account of the introduction of plays into Bishmizziin early in the twentieth century gives some idea of what happened in Munṣif. Tannous says that the play was introduced into Bishmizziin through the inspiration of returned emigrants, contact with city customs, and the encouragement of mission-school teachers. After a couple of years, girls started taking part, though over the strong objections of some elders. The play soon became a village festival with guests invited from other villages, the whole community taking part in one way or another. The plays were all in Classical Arabic, the plots all taken from Western novels or plays, or derived from Arabic historical events (Tannous, 1943, pp. 341–42).

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536 Presumably the development in Munṣif was similar. The plays are given on
545 the stage in the government school, which is equipped with footlights (candles with reflectors) and a painted backdrop (European forest scene). Arab themes have been used extensively, but *Hamlet* has been presented several times. (One young adult said he thought it was not a good play to give because the lion's share went to only one actor. It was better, he thought, to give a play in which six or seven, at least, took an equal part.) At the time of the writer's final departure from the village, the question of what play to give was being vigorously debated at all age levels. There appeared to be two opposing schools of thought, and tempers were running high in some cases.

COMPETITIVE SPORTS

526 Competitive games such as weight-lifting and javelin throwing have always been popular among the Arabs, but team athletics are something new, introduced by the American mission schools.

In Munṣif, volleyball is *the* game, and it appears to date, like the plays, from early in the twentieth century. At present, the village has three teams, ranked in order of the collective skill of their respective players. Most of the games are "intramural," within the village, but a regular series is played with the teams of other villages in the Qurnı. In 1951, the first team played a team from Bruumaana, [575] a large resort town above Beirut. The club appears to take a major role in organizing the teams and arranging games. The girls have their own team.

The following quotation, introduced here for comparative purposes, is taken from a chapter in Dodd (1940) which is credited to Afif Tannous, and probably the village mentioned in it is Bishmizziin.

> A few years ago, a group of us started the game of volleyball in our village in Northern Lebanon. The game was new, and the villagers were at first lukewarm about it. However, it did not take long before the enthusiasm for the game began to touch one individual after another and lead him to request the privilege of participating. Even old farmers, who would not hear of the idea at first, began to feel proud of having their boys belong to the village team. . . . The following summer, the girls of the village caught the spirit and organized their own teams. From our village the idea spread to several neighboring villages and in these volleyball teams were also organized. The next step that naturally followed was the interchange of volleyball matches among these different teams. Each week a match would be arranged for in a different village during which time hundreds of villagers would come from neighboring villages to attend the match. Volleyball became the game for the district, supplying the villages with an excellent opportunity for recreation. (Dodd, 1940, pp. 638–39.)

DANCING

535 Although no one put it into so many words, the impression was given that such traditional dances as the *dabki* are looked upon at best with sentimental attach-

871 From the beginning the village people agreed to the idea of having their girls get the same education as boys, and in the same school house. The move was a departure from the commonly held belief of the area that the girl should be kept at home. However, Bishmizzeen had been prepared for that. The American girls' school at Tripoli was the first strong influence. A few of the progressive leaders sent their girls to the Tripoli school. When these returned they were anxious to give the same chance
562 to all village girls. Aside from that, the two
871 sexes in Bishmizzeen had always mixed freely—as groups, not as individuals. To have both sexes at the same school was not altogether outside the scope of the village tradition. At the same time returned emigrants had their influence, too. Also it must be noted that the silk factory had already paved the way for the mixing of the two sexes in one institution. If the villagers had accepted that, it was not so difficult for them to see their girls and boys studying together under the supervision of men and women teachers. Consequently, the idea was accepted, and the coeducational school began to function smoothly and normally.

621 Within a few years the school became the focus
871 of village life. It seems that the mere physical
517 existence of the school building—a building that belonged to the community as a whole—made it possible for various new community activities to take place. The school society began to find it more logical and more convenient to hold its meetings in the school building. General village meetings, also began to take place there. From this, the next step was to hold receptions at the school and invite people from neighboring villages. At first only village talent was used at these receptions; then talent from the city, in the form of lecturers, poets and singers, was brought in. This added to the impetus of the educational movement in the village. The villagers became proud of their school and highly conscious of their community—Bishmizzeen, the village of education.

536 One more vital activity began to take place at
517 the school, involving the whole of the village community and other villages, too. That was the
[177] acting of plays. Several factors contributed to the creation of this activity—returned emigrants, contact with the educational circles of Tripoli and Beirut, and the early mission school teachers. The desire had been there for some time, but it could not be satisfied, due to the lack of a suitable building. Shortly after the school building was

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536 517 erected, play acting materialised. At first only young men acted. A year or two later, girls began to act, too. The village could not go beyond that and allow boys and girls to act together. That involved kissing and embracing between boys and girls on the stage, and the village held to the idea that such a kiss or an intimate embrace must be reserved to married couples!

834 562 536 578 It is essential that we should dwell briefly on the attitude of the village people towards acting by girls. The villagers had a strong taboo against acting by girls. Acting involved the parading of the girl on the stage in front of the crowd including young men and strangers. Remarks might be made about the girl, causing trouble between her family and those who made the remarks. Such parading had the further implication that the parents were eager to present their girl for marriage. That went against the custom which demanded that the girl should wait at home until her suitor came for her. The strongest objection was due to the fact that the people had always associated regular actresses with "bad morals." Gradually, due to the influence of leading families who were willing to begin with their girls, all of the above objections were broken down, until acting by the girls became a matter of course.

536 621 Within a few years acting became one more established village festival, involving the whole community. They had been accustomed to religious village festivals, and it was natural to fit the play in with the previous pattern and make of it one more such festival. Without any exception, everybody—actors, workers, church authorities and leaders—offered his or her services free, for the community welfare. Over a period of two months, preparation for the play would engage the attention of the village with everybody waiting for the occasion with thrilled anticipation. The preparation involved the various activities of casting, renting the equipment from Tripoli, constructing the stage, evening rehearsals, energetic arguments to persuade a certain girl to accept a certain role and her parents to permit her to act, and the distribution of invitations to the neighboring villages. Two or three days before the play, the village children would enlist as volunteers who would go from house to house in the village and gather all available chairs to seat the guests. The children's reward was the enjoyment of the activity itself and free admission during one evening. The play would be presented for three or four nights.

536 621 On each occasion, a huge crowd, from Bishmizzeen and neighboring villages would attend. An admission was charged, but no regular fee was assigned. Each paid what his "generosity" allowed. That was one more example of how the village fitted a new item of behavior into its established folkways. The income of the play was used for the school.

From the above description, it can be readily observed how play acting, centering in the village school, helped to bring about active village cooperation, a heightened consciousness of community identity, and an active inter-village association.

536 621 186 However, one must not neglect to mention a highly significant point, one more indication of what was going to happen to the village in its newly chosen trend. Not a single one of the plays that have been acted in the village had any relationship to village and farm life. The language used was always the higher literary form of Arabic, which had little connection with the local forms of expression. The theme of the play was either copied from Western novels or referred to old Biblical or historical events. Keeping in mind the tremendous influence of the play, by playing upon the emotions of the village people and creating in them a dynamic for new modes of behavior, one can realize to what extent it was influential in carrying the people away from the village. It widened the horizon of village life, as did the school, emigration, and the silk industry; but the horizon was widened to an extent that was conducive to the destruction of the community integrity.

IV

871 177 When the modern educational movement began in the country some fifty years ago, several educational systems appeared in the field and competed with each other in their effort to influence the people. These systems had a variety of cultural backgrounds—English, Russian, German, Italian, French, American, Turkish, and native. None of these systems had a purely educational character. Their educational message was combined either with religous, or political aims, or both.

In the course of time, each of these systems came to concentrate its influence upon one area of the country or one section of the population. In the case of Bishmizzeen, as was indicated above, the American Protestant system has been the most

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